

WASHINGTON, D.C. – Chairman Edolphus “Ed” Towns (D-NY) and Ranking Member Darrell Issa (R-CA) are calling on the State Department to aid the Committee’s investigation into the events leading up to, and including, the Christmas Day attack on Northwest Airlines Flight 253. Chairman Towns and Ranking Member Issa have identified issues associated with State Department policies and procedures that may have contributed to Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab’s ability to attempt a terror attack on American soil. The Committee is now seeking clarification from State regarding Mr. Abdulmutallab’s ability to board Flight 253.

In a letter to Secretary of State Hillary Clinton, Chairman Towns and Ranking Member Issa are asking for information about a series of policies and procedures that are regularly carried out by the State Department, such as issuance and cancellation of visas and the sharing of information across intelligence agencies, that now appear to have failed to prevent Mr. Abdulmutallab from entering the United States.

“I am deeply troubled by the apparent ease by which Mr. Abdulmutallab boarded Flight 253,” said Chairman Towns. “I appreciate Secretary Clinton’s willingness to assist the Committee’s investigation and to working with her on strengthening the State Department’s ability to prevent terrorists’ entry into the United States.”

Specifically, Towns and Issa are asking for information about where and how the suspect, Umar Farouk Abdulmutallab, obtained his visa; how did U.S. embassy officials handle information submitted by Dr. Umaru Mutallab (Umar Farouk’s father) about his son; if Department officials communicated the father’s statements to the agencies that control no-fly and terrorist watch lists; and if the Department’s information technology infrastructure or human error is to blame.

“More than a month later, this disturbing incident continues to raise serious questions about the coordination of our counterterrorism efforts. I believe the State Department’s response to our inquiry will help us work toward improving policies that will protect all Americans.”

Chairman Towns first launched the Committee’s investigation into the Christmas Day 2009 incident early last month. At that time, Towns called on the Government Accountability Office (GAO) to investigate the terrorist watch list after the incident raised serious concerns about the lack of integration between the watch lists and no-fly lists maintained by different federal agencies.

Towns and Issa asked Secretary Clinton to fulfill their request by February 12, 2010. The letter to Secretary Clinton is attached.

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